Mainstreaming gender in European Union development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa: promising numbers, narrow contents, telling silences

This article examines gender mainstreaming in European Union development cooperation with sub-Saharan African countries through quantitative and qualitative analyses of policy programming documents to evaluate whether a shift has been made from a conservative Women in Development paradigm to a transformative Gender and Development paradigm. First, a quantitative analysis assesses language, format and budgets. Next, a qualitative analysis embarks on a deeper reading of how gender (in)equality is framed and who has been given voice. We conclude that gender mainstreaming is only partly applied in a transformative way. The limited space for African civil society voices as well as the European Union’s concerns about its global role and its internal legitimacy are suggested as explanations.

Since its establishment in 1957, the European Union (EU) – then the European Economic Community (EEC) – has considered development cooperation with the sub-Saharan African region to be part of its policy agenda, primarily for geopolitical and economic reasons. Over the decades, EU–African relations have changed profoundly because former colonies gained both their independence and a voice in bi-regional policy development. The legitimacy and effectiveness of old policy paradigms were contested by African governments, non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations. The position of women is one of the issues where a paradigmatic change should have taken place, from a marginal, conservative approach called Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) or gender mainstreaming, a wide-ranging transformative approach that includes the voices of African women and their organisations. We want to assess whether this paradigmatic change has indeed materialised.

The first references to women’s rights in EU development cooperation with the sub-Saharan African region are found in the Third Lomé Convention signed in 1984 with 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP). It states that ‘co-operation shall support the ACP States’ efforts aimed at enhancing the work of women, improving their living conditions, expanding their role and promoting their status.
in the production and development process’ (ACP-EEC, 1984, Article 123). This so-called WID paradigm addressed the exclusion of women from the development process by creating specific projects for women. The Fourth Lomé Convention, signed in 1989, contained a full subsection on women. Article 287, which stated that projects and programmes should take into account ‘cultural, social, gender and environmental aspects’, could even be seen as a first step towards gender mainstreaming (ACP-EEC, 1989). The WID paradigm was increasingly criticised as an ‘add women and stir’ approach by feminist scholars, who pointed out that its narrow focus on women was ineffective as it ignored the underlying societal problems, namely unequal gender relations (Moser, 1993; Subrahmanian, 2007).

Following the 1995 United Nations (UN) Beijing Conference, the international community replaced the WID paradigm by a GAD paradigm and embraced the strategy of gender mainstreaming as ‘the fundamental GAD buzzword’ (Subrahmanian, 2007, 112). GAD was considered innovative; it focuses on gender without dislodging women as the central subject, as it recognises that improving women’s status requires analysis of the relations between women and men. Gender mainstreaming would widen the scope from add-on, small-scale projects for women, to the integration of a gender equality perspective into all policies (Johnsson-Latham, 2010). It stressed ‘the shared responsibility of women and men in removing imbalances in society’ (Council of Europe, 1998, 18). The participation and commitment of men was thus fundamental to changing the position of women.

In 1997, the commitment to gender mainstreaming was written into the EU Treaty, stating that ‘in all the activities [...] the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women’ (EU, 1997, Article 2). Accordingly, the EU has adopted a range of high-level policy documents confirming that gender has to be mainstreamed in all areas of development and into all programmes and projects at regional and country levels. Gender mainstreaming was also explicitly taken up in EU–African development policy when, in 2000, the Lomé Convention was replaced by a new Partnership Agreement between the ACP states and the EU, signed in Cotonou. In many respects, the Cotonou Agreement meant a break with the past. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming were now made priorities. Article 1 states that ‘systematic account shall be taken of the situation of women and gender

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1 These include the 1995 Council of Ministers Resolution on Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation; the 1998 Council of Ministers Regulation on Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation; the 2000 European Communication on the European Community’s Development Policy; the 2001 EC Communication on the Programme of Action for the Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Community Development Cooperation; the 2004 European Parliament and Council Regulation on Promoting Gender Equality in Development Cooperation; the 2006 Joint statement by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on EU Development Policy: ‘The European Consensus’; the 2007 EC Communication on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development Cooperation.
issues in all areas – political, economic and social’ (ACP-EC, 2000). The Cotonou Agreement further includes references to civil society participation and the promotion of women’s organisations. Not surprisingly, the agreement is considered ‘a ground-breaker in mainstreaming gender in development cooperation’ (Arts, 2006, 34).

The question arises whether the EU has lived up to the expectations. In this article, we assess to what extent the shift from a conservative WID to a transformative GAD paradigm has taken place in the programming of EU development policies towards the sub-Saharan African region and to what extent women’s organisations in ACP countries have been given a voice. Unlike Moser and Moser (2005), we do not review the progress of gender mainstreaming in policy-making and implementation in general. We limit ourselves to an assessment of changes of the terminology of and participation in the planning process and will comment on the implications of the (lack of) change thereof. First, a quantitative analysis of policy documents evaluates whether a change has taken place in the formal aspects of EU development policy as regards gender equality. Next, a qualitative critical frame analysis searches for substantial aspects of gender mainstreaming in the same sets of policy documents and contrasts them with the documents of sub-Saharan African civil society organisations.

**Gender mainstreaming and how to measure it**

**The concept**

After the Beijing Conference in 1995, the Council of Europe set up a Group of Specialists to develop guidelines on how to implement the strategy of gender mainstreaming. Widely used by European policy-makers, NGOs and researchers, the Council of Europe’s definition on gender mainstreaming is to date the most influential definition in the European context (Verloo, 2005a; Walby, 2005a):

> Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. (Council of Europe, 1998, 13)

The definition reflects the ‘integrationist’ agenda of mainstreaming, which aims to integrate gender equality in all policy routines (Mukhopadhyay, 2007), although the ultimate aim is ‘transforming gender relations’ (Council of Europe, 1998, 14). The transformative potential of gender mainstreaming is stressed by feminist academics and constitutes the long-term agenda to tackle deeply rooted societal norms and practices within which inequalities are embedded. Gender mainstreaming of development policies as a transformative strategy therefore differs from the integrationist approach, which addresses gender issues within existing development policy paradigms and bureaucratic institutions (Jahan, 1995; Beveridge and Nott, 2002; Subrahmanian,
2007) and reduces gender mainstreaming to ‘a way of more effectively achieving existing policy goals’ (Walby, 2005a, 323). A transformative agenda not only ‘implies the transformation and reorientation of existing policy paradigms’ (Walby, 2005a, 323), but also ‘requires efforts to create constituencies that demand change’ (Mukhopadhyay, 2007, 137). This condition is reflected in Naila Kabeer’s idea of transformative agency, which entails the ‘greater ability on the part of poor women to question, analyse and act on the structures of patriarchal constraint in their lives’ (Kabeer, 2005, 15). Mukhopadhyay shows how mainstreaming gender without including women’s voices leads to a de-contextualisation of policies and the ending of initiatives specifically directed towards women, which is detrimental to women’s interests in countries where extreme gender segregation requires women’s issues to be addressed separately (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Therefore, the concept of gender mainstreaming as a transformative strategy involves the naming and challenging of existing gender and power relations through policy interventions wherein formerly disempowered women and their organisations participate in questioning, analysing and acting upon the gendered world.

The dataset

The aforementioned high-level policy documents (see footnote 1) offer an overview of EU policy objectives on gender equality and development. In order to ascertain their translation into concrete measures in EU development policy towards sub-Saharan Africa, we have selected Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) and National Indicative Programmes (NIPs). CSPs and NIPs are bilateral agreements between the EU and the government of the partner country. CSPs consist of three parts: the Country Analysis, which depicts the social, political, economic, trade and environmental situation; the Overview of Past and Ongoing Development Aid; and the Response Strategy, which establishes the development priorities in order to tackle the problems described in the country analysis. The NIP makes the priorities from the Response Strategy operational by outlining the specific programmes in selected focal and non-focal sectors and adds timetables, budgets and measurement indicators.

In theory, the drafting process of these agreements is initiated in the respective countries. The National Authorising Office (the unit dealing with the programming of EU Aid, mostly located in the Ministry of Finance or Economic Affairs and Planning), along with the EU Delegation, draws up a first draft of the CSP, including an indication of the main priorities for EU action in the country. This draft is then presented to the European Commission (notably the country desk officer in Brussels), which produces a second draft, which is in turn circulated to the National Authorizing Office for another round of consultations. Once redrafted, the CSP is sent back to the Commission for final adoption (Cotonou Working Group, 2006). According to Article 4 of the
Cotonou Agreement, civil society representatives should be involved in this programming process. This joint policy development process, rather than EU-directed policy planning, reflects the ideas contained in the Paris Declaration (OECD, 2005), where the European Commission has committed itself to support partner country ownership and even respect partner country leadership. Critical observers agree, however, that the drafting process does not allow any ‘democratic “ownership”’ of CSPs and that the programming process is ‘often used as a way of imposing Europe’s economic and geostrategic interests upon ACP countries, at the expenses of the populations’ actual needs’ (CONCORD, 2010, 1).

We have analysed the CSPs and NIPs of 12 countries: Botswana, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia. Among the 48 sub-Saharan countries, these were the only ones for which a full set of documents was available. To detect possible progress over time, we compare the first ‘generation’ CSPs and NIPs (2002–2007) from these twelve countries with the second ‘generation’ CSPs and NIPs (2008–2013).

First cut: formal aspects

We have opted for a simple word count as a very first step towards assessing the formal presence of gender mainstreaming. A word count gives an indication of the extent to which the discourse has changed from a focus on women to gender. When a GAD approach is in place, we should see at least an equal share of references to women and to men. An imbalance would indicate that implicitly one sex is taken as the norm, whereas the other sex is constituted as a problem. We have counted references that relate exclusively to women (including ‘women’, ‘woman’, ‘girl’, ‘mother’ and ‘female’), exclusively to men (including ‘men’, ‘man’, ‘boy’, ‘father’ and ‘male’) and references that relate to both sexes equally (including ‘gender’ and ‘sex’).

Second, we examined to what extent gender issues are incorporated into the different parts of the CSP and the NIP. According to EU’s own standards, the programming documents should contain ‘a strong gender analysis and country profile, the integration of gender issues in the political and policy dialogue’, and should address ‘equality and women’s empowerment in the NIP’ (EC, 2008a, 8). The texts were scanned on references linked to gender (in)equality.

Obviously, the budget should also systematically address gender equality to make the commitment credible (Beetham, 2010; Elson and Sharp, 2010). A scoring system was

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developed to estimate the percentage of the budget that is gender mainstreamed. The scores range from ‘not mentioned at all’ (no gender mainstreaming), to ‘a one-sentence reference to gender equality’ (sector will perhaps be gender-mainstreamed), to ‘two to three concrete references to gender equality in the objectives or expected results’ (this sector is likely to be gender mainstreamed), to ‘four or more concrete references to gender equality in the objectives or expected results’ (very likely to be gender mainstreamed) and last to ‘gender is integrated in one or more performance indicators’ (fully gender mainstreamed). Since every NIP has a set of performance indicators linked to the sector’s goals by which to monitor and evaluate the success of the development programme, it is reasonable to say that the inclusion of so-called ‘gender indicators’ corresponds to having the development objectives linked to gender equality in practice. For example, an NIP with the focal sector ‘Justice’ and the objective to reform the justice system could have ‘perception of the credibility of the judicial system’ as one of its indicators. If this indicator is disaggregated by sex or if it contains a specific indicator linked to gender (for example, ‘number of gender-based violence cases resolved’), it corresponds to having the development objectives linked to gender equality in practice. These so-called ‘gender indicators’ can be either indicators broken down by sex (for example school enrolment rate for girls and for boys) or specific indicators measuring improved gender equality (for example a decrease in gender-based violence). Since gender indicators constitute a critical link between policy aspirations and policy practice (Walby, 2005b; Beetham, 2010), we regard the use of such indicators as the most definite sign available in the programming phase of being fully gender mainstreamed.

We consider a policy to be formally gender mainstreamed if there is an equal share of specific references to women and men (language), if gender is part of all programming phases (format) and if gender issues and gender indicators are included in all budgetary sectors (budget). We consider such a formal policy change to be a necessary but not a sufficient step to substantiate a paradigmatic shift from a conservative to a transformative approach.

Language

In all the CSPs and NIPs examined, references that relate to women are far more common (52 to 54 per cent) than references that relate to men (12 to 14 per cent) or references that relate to both sexes in relation to each other (31 to 36 per cent) (see Table 1).

Given that there is an overrepresentation of references to women, we conclude that the language used is more the traditional WID language than a genuine GAD or gender mainstreaming language. Comparing the first generation with the second generation, we see that all three kinds of references (female-related, male-related and
gender-related) taken together have increased by 218 per cent, but that the share of references to women as compared to references to men and gender has not become more balanced. This indicates that in their wording, policy documents continue to focus mainly on women.

### The incorporation of gender issues

As the results from Table 2 indicate, gender issues are found in each part of the CSP (Country Analysis, Overview of Cooperation and Response Strategy) and in the NIP. This is the case in the first as well as in the second generation documents. Comparing the two generations, we notice an increase in the total number of references to gender issues (+77 per cent), indicating a positive evolution over time. Gender issues continue to be found mostly in the Country Analysis (60 per cent), but over time gender references have made the most significant increase in the NIP, going from 14.8 per cent to 21.5 per cent (an increase of 6.7 per cent, see Table 2).

### Table 1 Number of references to women/men/gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 sub-Saharan African CSPs and NIPs</th>
<th>2002–2007</th>
<th>2008–2013</th>
<th>Change between 2nd and 1st generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to women</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to men</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to gender</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>1431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the authors

### Table 2 Number and spread of references to gender equality issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 sub-Saharan African CSPs and NIPs</th>
<th>2002–2007</th>
<th>2008–2013</th>
<th>Change between 2nd and 1st generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP, Country Analysis</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP, Overview</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP, Response Strategy</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIP</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the authors
However, we found an imbalance at the level of the Country Analysis’s subsections. In fact, gender issues are mainly found in subsections on the social situation of the country and to a lesser extent in subsections on the political or economic situation. This means that problems of gender inequality – ranging from the pay gap to political representation – are mainly linked to the ‘social’.

The budget

The sum of the NIP budget amounted to 1,612 million euro for the period 2002–2007 and to 3,180 million euro for the period 2008–2013. As seen in Table 3, for the first generation NIPs, up to 77 per cent of this total budget was not gender mainstreamed at all. Gender was not mentioned once in the objectives or expected results of the budgetary sectors. For the second generation, the share of the budget that is not gender mainstreamed drops to 24.4 per cent. Before acclaiming this breakthrough, we should point out that the increase of ‘gender mainstreaming’ is highest for sections that include gender as a one-sentence phrase without further specification. This indicates that part of the improvement is probably cosmetic, as we suspect in cases where an NIP mentions that ‘gender is a crosscutting issue that will be mainstreamed’, without specifying what this entails. It is possible that this part of the budget will be gender mainstreamed in the implementation phase, but it seems to be more plausible that the inclusion of a single gender phrase is a merely formal fulfilment of the EU programming standards.

Nevertheless, we found that gender equality aims are being increasingly specified in the NIPs. The categories ‘likely to be gender mainstreamed’ (up to three references) and ‘very likely to be gender mainstreamed’ (four or more references) show considerable increases (12.1 and 10.4 per cent, respectively). For these two categories, it is reasonable to say that it is (very) likely they will be gender mainstreamed in practice, although gender was not included explicitly in the measurement indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Gender mainstreaming of EU–sub-Saharan African development aid*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not gender mainstreamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps gender mainstreamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely to be gender mainstreamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely to be gender mainstreamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender mainstreamed w/indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In million €
This includes, for example, Ghana’s budgetary subsection on ‘decentralisation’ (local participation and decision-making) stating that women will be involved in planning and setting priorities regarding investment choices... particularly vis-à-vis the design and management of water and sanitation projects (as women play a key role in water collection and storage, waste water disposal and hygiene education and promotion). (EC, 2007)

We conclude that gender is increasingly present in all budgetary sectors of the programming of aid. In the newest generation of NIPs, about 75 per cent of the sectors mention gender equality objectives in their programmes, indicating that a budgetary add-on WID approach has been left behind. Over time, there has been an increase in the specification of how gender will be mainstreamed and gender is increasingly included in the measurement indicators of the development programmes. Nevertheless, two qualifications apply.

First, although the part of the budget that uses gender indicators has increased from 20 per cent to 26 per cent, this increase has not been matched by a larger scope of gender mainstreaming. In fact, gender indicators are predominately used in four policy domains, including HIV/AIDS (12 indicators), sexual and reproductive health (8 indicators), education (4 indicators) and employment (4 indicators). This corresponds with the findings of an OECD study on the gender equality focus of aid programmes, which found that the gender equality focus of EU programmes was concentrated in education, health and ‘other social infrastructure’ (including support to women’s equality organisations) (OECD, 2011).

Second, while percentages in such quantitative studies may reflect formal progress as regards gender mainstreaming, we agree with Elisabeth Arend that ‘they do not measure the quality of gender mainstreaming’ and they do not ask whether ‘consultation with local beneficiaries and gender-focused civil society organisations’ took place (Arend, 2010, 3, emphasis in the original). Accordingly, in the next section we will provide a deeper reading of the documents.

**Second cut: substantial aspects**

In this section, we examine the same set of CSPs and NIPs in order to ascertain whether EU–African development aid really embodies a transformative GAD approach. To that end, we additionally analysed texts from five major African women’s networks.4

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4 All selected civil society organisations and networks are directed by a board of African women and men. Some of the organisations are (partly) funded by Western NGOs or governments. These organisations are the African Feminist Forum (AFF), the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde, Synergie Genre et Développement (ENDA-SYNFEV), Gender-Based Violence Prevention Network (GBVPN) and the Solidarity for African Women’s Rights Coalition (SOAWR).
Analysing the views of relevant civil society actors not only allows us to detect possible ‘silences’ in the CSPs and NIPs (what is not said), but also helps to determine whether gender mainstreaming is implemented as an agenda-setting approach that gives ‘attention to the substantive objectives of the women’s movement’ (Jahan, 1995, 127).

Critical Frame Analysis was used for an in-depth examination of the documents. This is a methodology that builds on social movement theory (Verloo, 2005b) and assumes that policy documents contain a diagnosis (what is the problem) and a prognosis (solution/s) of the issue at stake. It is from these dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis that implicit or explicit representations emerge of who is deemed to have the problem, who caused it and who should solve it (Lombardo and Meier, 2008). First, we examine which gender issues are identified as problems and solutions in the CSPs and NIPs. We establish what issues are left out by contrasting the gender (in)equality frames in the policy documents with the gender (in)equality frames in the texts from the African women’s organisations. Next, we examine to what extent the problems and solutions are gendered, what roles are attributed to both men and women, and to what extent are gender stereotypes challenged or reproduced. We also examine who has a ‘voice’ in defining problems and solutions and who is being talked about, to identify which actors are included and excluded in the policy process (Lombardo and Meier, 2008). We consider policies to be genuinely gender mainstreamed, and thus potentially transformative, when the problems and solutions concerning gender (in)equality are framed in a way that concerns and involves both men and women, and when these policies include voices from African civil society.

**Framing gender**

In-depth content analysis of the programming documents reveals that gender inequality in the sub-Saharan African country diagnoses is mainly framed as a problem of high levels of maternal mortality (14 CSPs) and lack of access to education (12 CSPs). Other important frames are the link between gender inequality and poverty (11 CSPs), HIV/AIDS (10 CSPs) and gender-based violence (9 CSPs). Comparison of the texts shows that civil society actors are concerned with problems that do not appear in the CSPs and NIPs. Important ‘silences’ in the gender inequality diagnosis were the effects of trade liberalisation on (poor) women (SOAWR, 2005), the exclusion of African women from ICT in daily life (ENDA-SYNFEV, 2005), women’s human rights violations in conflict and post-conflict settings (FEMNET, 2007), the link between myths of ‘masculinity’ and gender-based violence (GBVPN, 2008), the link between HIV/AIDS and poverty (SOAWR, 2005) and ‘exploitative and negative images of women that dominate television, newspapers and magazines’ (GBVPN, 2008, 4). In addition, civil society actors generally offer more structural and systemic gender analyses. The gender effects of globalisation, for example, are a major concern in three of the
examined civil society texts. Equally, the system of patriarchy is discussed extensively in four civil society texts, yet it is barely mentioned in the CSPs and NIPs (the terms ‘patriarchy’/‘patriarchal’ appear 21 times in about 150 pages of examined civil society documents and only six times in about 2,000 pages of CSPs and NIPs).

The most frequently mentioned solutions put forward in the NIPs are focused on gender-equal access to education (9 NIPs), supporting civil society organisations that promote women’s rights (8 NIPs), reducing HIV/AIDS (5 NIPs), promoting maternal and reproductive health (3 NIPs) and integrating gender equality issues in the transport sector (3 NIPs). An important limitation is that solutions for gender inequality are often framed as means to an end, a risk linked to the integrationist approach to gender mainstreaming (Walby, 2005a). This is, for example, the case in the Ethiopian CSP where it is stated that ‘women’s contribution to household income and production is crucial for fighting poverty’ (EC, 2002). In this case, gender equality is used instrumentally to reach the goal of poverty eradication and not as an aim in itself. Such instrumentalist policies serve to maintain traditional gender roles rather than to dismantle gender inequalities (Molyneux, 2006; Roy, 2010). Moser and Moser aptly summarise the debate on the pros and cons of instrumentalism. It can be defended for pragmatic reasons because ‘in the “real” world of politics, compromises and strategic alliances are parts of reality’, but it ‘risks depoliticizing the transformative nature of the feminist agenda’ and thus strips gender mainstreaming of its transformative potential (Moser and Moser, 2005, 14–15). A criticism, which specifically targets the link between gender and anti-poverty programs, is levelled by Chant, who convincingly challenges the ‘feminisation of poverty’ thesis on analytical and empirical grounds. She argues that it is highly questionable whether ‘the “win-win” formula which links greater gender equity, economic growth and effective poverty alleviation’ holds (Chant, 2008, 172).

Of the five dominant solutions, four are framed within the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): to achieve universal primary education (Goal 2); to promote gender equality and empower women, including the concrete target to eliminate gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015 (Goal 3); to improve maternal health, including the targets to reduce maternal mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health (Goal 5); and to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6). Although ‘the more optimistic readings of the MDGs’ have stressed their contribution to “en-gendering” the global development agenda’ (Chant, 2007, 10), feminists around the world have criticised the MDGs for their narrow scope and minimal agenda (Chant, 2010; Subrahmanian, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Roy, 2010). In their view, the MDGs ignore systemic political and power issues concerning gender inequality and do not use a human rights framework, which depicts ‘people as “rights holders” who can mobilise to demand the realisation of their rights’ rather than as passive recipients of policies (Barton, 2005, 29). Furthermore, the emphasis is on girls’
rather than women’s voices and rights and ‘far-reaching but controversial areas’ such as land rights, male violence and sexual and reproductive rights are ignored (Johnsson-Latham, 2010, 44). Feminists ‘struggling against the vice of neoliberal theory and policy’ even view the MDGs as ‘a significant step, but in the wrong direction’ (Saith, 2006, 1174). This criticism was also voiced in one of the civil society texts, which cited Hilda Tadria, cofounder of the African Women’s Development Fund. She was quoted as stating that the MDGs do not go far enough because ‘achieving gender equality has more to do with socially accepted cultural beliefs and ideologies that uphold male privilege than with educational or economic goals’ (SOAWR, 2005, 28).

In the outlining of solutions, it is possible to detect important ‘silences’. In contrast to the CSPs and NIPs, civil society texts pay significantly more attention to discussing ways out of the ‘deeply rooted societal norms, attitudes and practices’ (GBVPN, 2008, 2) that are causing gender inequalities. They propose a series of solutions, such as a ‘new masculinity television campaign’ (GBVPN, 2008, 3); a specific education programme on exemplary women’s lives, which can serve as ‘role model strategies’ (FEMNET, 2007, 7); encouraging local-level groups’ involvement in the campaign for women’s rights in order ‘to have a critical mass of support’ (SOAWR, 2005, 9); providing training for grassroots women’s organisations in how to use new media (GBVPN); documenting the voices and experiences of women whose human rights have been violated in conflict situations and bringing the perpetrators to justice (FEMNET, 2007); allowing women to participate in an informed, responsible and inclusive African information society and ‘demystifying the technical side of ICT’ (ENDA-SYNFEV, 2005, 68); popularising the feminist charter, which includes its translation into as many languages as possible and its diffusion through different media (AFF, 2006). In general, the analyses from civil society organisations are more systemic-critical than the EU policy documents and explicitly aim at ‘structural transformation’ (AFF, 2006, 6). For example, they approach patriarchy as a changeable system which is historically and geographically contingent and also stress its interrelation with systems ‘of class, race, ethnic, religious and global-imperialism’ (AFF, 2006, 11).

Analysing African civil society voices on the topic of gender equality thus reveals that the EU’s gender mainstreaming approach is missing important aspects in outlining problems and designing solutions for gender equality. Yet, comparing the two generations of documents, we noted that the solutions for gender inequality are less focused on education alone in the second generation. In the first generation CSPs, enabling access to (mainly basic) education was the dominant remedy for gender inequality. In the second generation, new solutions, such as participation of women in local decision-making (EC, 2007) or installing a gender focal person in ten ministries in Lesotho, are emerging next to the classical gender themes (HIV, maternal and reproductive health, education). These could be first steps towards a more transformative approach.
Problem- and solution-holders

Examining the gender awareness of the diagnoses in the policy documents, we noticed that women are portrayed as the main problem-holders, who have to make an effort to catch up with the ‘silent’ male norm. Men rarely appear in the policy documents and are almost never problematised. When men are mentioned, it is mostly in a general phrase referring to equality between men and women, or in quantitative terms (for example, the percentage of boys/girls enrolled). In the area of decision-making, not a single CSP or NIP mentions men as problem-holders. Several CSPs and NIPs refer to the underrepresentation of women, but not a word is said about the overrepresentation of men in politics or business. Power structures that hamper equal participation, such as all-male political networks, are not discussed. On top of being the main problem-holders, women are also made responsible for the solutions in the NIPs, since men are completely absent from that part of the planning phase and are never explicitly addressed as a target group to solve gender inequalities. For that matter, the portrayal of women as the sole problem- and solution-holders is not unique to EU development policy, but is just as common in internal EU policies on gender equality (Lombardo and Meier, 2008).

It is also remarkable that references to the gendered distribution of unpaid care work – housework and care of persons that occurs in homes and communities on an unpaid basis – are scarce in the diagnoses and absent in the prognoses. In the country analysis, only four CSPs out of 24 mention women’s double burden or household tasks, although it is widely recognised that ‘unpaid care work is a major contributing factor to gender inequality and women’s poverty’ (Budlender, 2004, v; 2008; Razavi, 2007; Gammage, 2010). This neglect is problematic for several reasons. While the silence on this topic implicitly legitimises the unequal division of care work between men and women, it also implies that such work is valueless and ignores its connection to economic growth and development in general (Budlender, 2004; 2008; Razavi, 2007). Furthermore, leaving women’s disproportionally large share in non-market care work out of the analysis has implications for the quality of the overall gender analysis. This is because the gender bias in unpaid care work creates a gendered ‘time and income poverty’ (Gammage, 2010) that has a direct impact on several of the issues that are put forward in the CSPs and NIPs, such as women’s access to (full-time) education and jobs or their vulnerability to gender-based violence. The invisibility of these links in the analysed documents results in a biased gender analysis.

Voice

Reviewing the issue of women’s participation, Moser and Moser rightfully state, ‘Requiring that women are represented or consulted is necessary but not sufficient: are their voices actually heard?’ (2005, 19). A prerequisite to transforming the devel-
Development agenda is to give women who are affected by development interventions and their organisations a voice ‘to shape the objectives, priorities and strategies of development’ (Jahan, 1995, 127). As regards the inclusion of women’s organisations, only five out of 24 CSPs mention that a women’s organisation was included in the CSP drafting process (Rwanda and Botswana 2002; Swaziland, Ghana, Botswana 2008). Indeed, the Ethiopian CSP (2008) mentions that gender was discussed during the civil society consultation process without mentioning the inclusion of women’s organisations. Up to seven CSPs refer to women’s organisations in other parts of the text (Ethiopia, Gambia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania 2002; Ethiopia and Gambia 2008). Furthermore, the sources referred to when giving information on gender equality issues are predominantly UN, World Bank or government sources. Apparently, national or regional women’s organisations are not considered as authoritative sources of information on gender inequality. As regards the inclusion of African women’s organisations as beneficiaries, the situation is slightly more positive. Eight out of 24 NIPs have some aid earmarked for supporting civil society groups that promote women’s rights. Therefore, as regards gender mainstreaming, the picture of the drafting process is mixed. A voice is given to civil society groups that represent female stakeholders, but only in a very limited way. In most cases, women’s organisations are written about, but they do not write. They are not mentioned as a reliable source in the CSPs and NIPs. Women’s organisations are called upon to implement policies, but are poorly integrated in the drafting of these policies. This, according to Marty Chen, might compromise their effectiveness. In her insightful analysis of the conditions for the successful reduction of poverty, she argues that ‘the working poor, especially women’ need to be empowered to hold policymakers accountable. They need to have a ‘representative – and stronger – voice, and to make rule-setting and policy-making institutions more inclusive, offering them a seat at the policy table’ (Chen, 2010, 470). Unfortunately, the EU-sub-Saharan African policy-making process does not meet these conditions yet.

**Conclusion**

This article has analysed the programming of EU development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa for the period 2002 to 2013, in order to evaluate whether a shift has taken place from a conservative WID to a transformative GAD paradigm. We would consider policies at least *formally* gender mainstreamed and thus *potentially* transformative if there were an equal share of references to women and men, if gender were part of all policy programming phases and if gender issues and gender indicators were included in every budgetary sector. Well aware of the danger of purely cosmetic change, we have used this method to produce a first cut. The quantitative analysis showed that gender issues are increasingly mentioned in all the chapters of the CSPs
and NIPs, indicating that gender is included in all phases of the programming cycle. Furthermore, in the newest generation of CSPs and NIPs, gender is integrated in large parts of the budget of EU aid for sub-Saharan Africa. However, we found that the language used in the CSPs and NIPs remains a WID language, as we counted an enduring overrepresentation of references to women compared to references to gender or men. Gender equality concerns also remain linked to a few subthemes such as health, education and ‘the social’. Nevertheless, the quantitative comparison of the two generations of agreements shows that formally the gender mainstreaming approach travels increasingly well within the bureaucracies of the EU and the partner countries.

Examining the substantial aspects of gender mainstreaming, however, does not paint the same pretty picture. We would consider policies to be genuinely gender mainstreamed if the problems and solutions that they articulate challenge existing societal norms concerning gender roles, are framed in a way that involves both men and women and give African civil society a voice. The critical frame analysis reveals that the gender mainstreaming approach in EU–African development cooperation is to some extent integrationist, predominately instrumentalist and only partially participatory. The approach consolidates the status quo since conceptions of masculinity and femininity, as well as the gendered division of care work, are not questioned. Women are consistently singled out, while men are rarely mentioned. In general, men are the silent norm and women are the problem- and solution-holders who have to catch up with the male norm. This conception of women as sole problem- and solution-holders resembles the WID paradigm and is contradictory to a transformative gender mainstreaming approach, where men and women share responsibility in removing imbalances in society. The approach is integrationist to the extent that apart from the ‘usual suspects’ (health and education) gender issues have been included in a few new domains (e.g. transport). Furthermore, the approach remains predominately instrumentalist as gender issues are framed within the dominant development policy paradigms and as they are ‘sold’ as a way of more effectively achieving other policy goals such as the MDGs. Lastly, the approach is only partly participatory since there is little room for the objectives and voices of African women’s organisations.

We thus conclude that in the programming of EU–African development cooperation, the shift from a conservative WID to a transformative GAD paradigm has only been partially made. The quantitative analysis revealed success in terms of gender mainstreaming budget and format, but not in terms of transformative language. The qualitative analysis exposed a limited agenda, showing that gender is mostly mainstreamed in traditional sectors and that policies are directed at women only.

The ‘quantitative success’ of gender mainstreaming can possibly be explained by the ambiguous ambitions of the EU as regards cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa and gender mainstreaming. As Roggeband argues, the acceptance and implementa-
tion of gender mainstreaming depends on the resonance between the framing of gender mainstreaming and the dominant development frames (Roggeband, 2009). For the EU, the MDGs constitute the dominant development frame within which gender mainstreaming has to be realised. Indeed, since 2005 the EU has taken a front position in achieving the MDGs and declared to step up its efforts (EC, 2005). This course was reconfirmed in 2008 by a Commission Communication stressing ‘the EU’s key role on the international scene and its commitment to the MDGs’ (EC, 2008b, 3).

It is not new that the EU has the ambition to become an important player on the international scene. What is more, a strong external policy, which enables the EU to position itself as a normative power in the global arena, strengthens the EU’s internal legitimacy. Or as Diez puts it in a more poststructuralist way, Normative Power Europe constructs the EU’s identity ‘against an image of others in the “outside world”’, which ‘has important implications for the way EU policies treat those outsiders, and for the degree to which its adherence to its own norms is scrutinised within the EU’ (Diez, 2005, 614). Thus, focusing on a very visible and measurable ambition, such as the MDGs, not only bolsters the EU’s cherished identity as a normative power, it also draws the attention away from internal problems – be they legitimacy problems or gender equality gaps within the EU. It thereby gives Europe a more benevolent face without requiring an internal transformation (Debusscher, 2011).

The qualitative failure of gender mainstreaming can be explained by the reluctance to include sub-Saharan African civil society organisations promoting gender equality and by the gap that exists between their views on gender (in)equality and those expressed in the CSPs and NIPs. This reluctance seems to have both practical and ideological grounds. As regards the practical grounds, exploratory interviews5 with EU delegation staff and women’s organisations have indicated that the exclusion of women’s organisations from the drafting process can be attributed to a lack of resources to conduct proper consultations and attract the relevant civil society actors, but also to a sheer disinterest in gender equality issues at the delegation level. Ideologically, the more transformative issues that are put forward by African civil society organisations, such as radically questioning masculinities and femininities, do not fit within the EU’s dominant development paradigm, which is focused on achieving the MDGs and does not significantly challenge gender relations or power structures.

The neglect of African civil society organisations is not without implications for the quality of gender mainstreaming in the CSPs and NIPs. As we have shown, conceptions of gender (in)equality are limited and risk losing touch with the lives and experiences of the stakeholders. The failure of EU actors to include sub-Saharan African organisations working on gender equality in the consultation processes undermines the transformative potential of the gender mainstreaming approach in two respects. Not only is the lack of space for counter-public voices detrimental to empowerment

5 Interviews conducted with EU staff and civil society in Kigali and Monrovia between May and July 2011.
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(Verloo, 2005a), it is also harmful for the relevance of policies because what shows up as a ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ for policy-makers is limited by their institutional culture and its predetermined goals. Clearly, this restricts the scope of policy-making and of the allocation of resources (Beveridge and Nott, 2002). As ‘gender mainstreaming is constructed, articulated and transformed through discourse’ (Walby, 2005a, 338), policy-makers carry the responsibility to push gender equality further by involving civil society and individual activists promoting gender equality so as ‘to create a more dynamic framing process where diagnosis and prognosis are adapted to new emerging needs and perspectives’ (Roggeband, 2009, 59). Otherwise, promises of paradigmatic change remain a dead letter, albeit a letter that can be counted.

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